DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 276 517 PS 016 200

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TITLE The Power and Limitations of Parents.
INSTITUTION Texas Univ., Austin. Hogg Foundation for Mental Health.
PUB DATE 86
NOTE 20p.; Paper originally presented at the Institute for the Humanities Lecture Series (Salado, TX, 1985).
AVAILABLE FROM Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, Publications Division, P.O. Box 7998, Austin, TX 78713-7998 ($0.50; 100 or more, $0.44 each).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Biological Influences; Birth Order; Cognitive Development; Empathy; *Identification (Psychology); *Individual Development; *Individual Differences; Memory; Moral Development; Parent Influence; *Personality; Role Models

ABSTRACT

Human development has two different stories to tell. One describes the growth of the universal characteristics that are present in all human beings because humans possess a particular set of genes. Four examples of biologically prepared, universal characteristics in the psychological growth of children are the growth of memory, of moral sense and empathy, of readiness for responsibility, and of the ability to recognize inconsistency. The second story, which is of greater interest to citizens, seeks to explain why individuals are psychologically different from one another. Six conditions contribute importantly to evident differences in four qualities valued by contemporary Americans: technical ability, wealth and status, the ability to enter into close and satisfying social relationships with others, and personal happiness. The contributing conditions are biological temperament, birth order, parental influences, identification with role models, success and failure, and chance and history. Only one, parental influences, is completely within the power of parents. A second, identification with role models, is somewhat within the power of parents. The remaining four are less easily influenced. Thus, while parents should be loving and conscientious, and should reflect on their actions, they must realize that their growing child is a product of the coming together of a great many coherent events. An individual life is a complex story with many collaborators. (RH)

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# The Power and Limitations of Parents

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# THE POWER AND LIMITATIONS OF PARENTS

by Jerome Kagan

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Austin, Texas 78713–7998

# EDITOR'S NOTE

The text of this pamphlet was originally presented by Dr. Jerome Kagan when he was a guest speaker at the 1985 lecture series of the Institute for the Humanities at Salado, Texas. The author has been on the faculty of Harvard University for more than 20 years. His special area of interest is in cognitive and personality development during the first ten years of life.

Dr. Kagan is author, coauthor, or editor of more than 12 books on child development. The August 1984 issue of *The New York Times Book Review* carried an article about the psychologist's current book, *The Nature of the Child*, in which reviewer Daniel Goleman wrote:

> . . . Mr. Kagan, a professor of developmental psychology at Harvard, lays siege to commonly held assumptions about children and their growth. Mr. Kagan, a hard thinker about these topics and one of today's most eminent child experts, enunciates the developing edge of consensus in his field. What is startling about this book is its strong challenge to a number of beliefs about children that are so widely accepted—by parents, therapists, and even some of Mr. Kagan's colleagues—that they are taken as givens.

The Hogg Foundation has been a supporter of the lecture series, and its staff members who heard Dr. Kagan's presentation realized that his thought-provoking conclusions would find an interested audience in readers of Foundation publications. The Hogg Foundation is grateful to Dr. Kagan and to Dr. Harry A. Wilmer, President of the Institute for the Humanities, for permission to reproduce the address in this form.

Charlene Warren

# THE POWER AND LIMITATIONS OF PARENTS

This talk is about the mystery of human development. Because human development is of such concern to all of us, whether citizens or parents, we care about the facts that are true. We want certain beliefs to be valid, and we resist giving credence to facts we do not like.

Major changes have occurred in our views of family and child since the early 18th century. In the first place, historical changes made possible a large middle class that could afford to relieve women of the task of gathering food and so give them more time for leisure. As European cities grew and a larger middle class emerged, three beliefs—which are still with us—became established. In my view these beliefs are stronger now than they were two-and-a-half centuries ago.

The first belief is that the experiences of the infant in the family set the course of the child's development, and once these original qualities are established they are difficult to change. The second belief is that the most critical ingredient for the child's psychological growth is the mother's love. And beginning in the late 19th century this love had to be physical—embraces and kisses—rather than only verbal affirmations. The third belief is that the mother is the central figure in the child's development.

Although each of these beliefs might be true, the scientific basis for their truth remains meager. If a petit jury were to decide on the truth of these statements, I suspect they would determine that they should be tried in the court of science to see how innocent or guilty they are.

We now ask why these three beliefs grew so strong. Of the many relevant factors, I suggest that three were most central. I've already mentioned one—namely, the rise of a powerful middle class that did not need female labor. However, women needed an assignment, and all citizens agreed on one that was important. Total devotion to raising the infant and child became the central mission for the married woman. As a result, the dignity of women in the West rose considerably. European and American women have more dignity in this century, and especially during the last two decades, than they ever had in any society in the past.

An important corollary of the rise in dignity was the awarding of an enhanced importance to love and affection. As I read history, it appears that whenever a society celebrates women it also celebrates the moods and acts of love and affection.

The third factor involves the set of philosophical premises we call the Protestant tradition. The assumption that the mother was a central figure and that love should be in the family, not outside the family, was an important credo in the Protestant Reformation. Luther was troubled by the high rate of adultery in his society and urged men to select wives who would be not only good mothers but also attractive and gratifying love objects, as well. A final component of the Protestant credo is the imperative to train character. The task of training character belongs to the mother.

I trust you appreciate that the belief in the power of early experience, the significance of love, and the centrality of the mother cannot be as true as contemporary magazines and books imply. With so many other factors influencing the growing child, the assumptions that stem from these beliefs must be less valid than current ideology pretends.

# TWO DEVELOPMENTAL STORIES

Human development has two different stories to tell. One describes the growth of the universal characteristics that are present in all human beings because humans possess a particular set of genes. Humans have a generative language, apes do not; humans experience guilt, shame, and pride; apes do not; humans create laws and mathematics, and apes do not. As long as a child is not locked in a closet or confined to a basement, he or she will resemble other children around the world. The reasons for this universality comprise an interesting story, especially to psychologists, psychiatrists and pediatricians. The moral of the story is that regardless of the family in which a child grows, he or she will demonstrate some of these universal qualities.

The second plot, which is of greater interest to citizens, seeks to explain the psychological differences among us. One hundred people, of any age, are different. In textbooks this idea is called personality. And therefore it is interesting to ask what factors create different personalities.

I shall deal first with the universals and then turn to what we know about the causes of personality.

## BIOLOGICAL PREPAREDNESS

As the brain grows in accord with its genetic script, the infant becomes able to behave and think in new ways. A six-month-old can neither understand nor speak language no matter what parents do because the brain is not sufficiently mature. However, when the child is twelve to fifteen months old it has reached a level of maturity that enables it to use the experiences of hearing speech to begin to utter words. We say that children are biologically prepared to learn, as long as they hear some language. The key phrase is "biologically prepared." Zoologists say that birds are biologically prepared to sing the song of their species if they hear that song. So if a canary, hatched and raised in a laboratory and isolated from all birds, hears on tape the song of a canary at the right time in its development, it will later sing its proper song. All the bird needs is a brief exposure. Let us now examine four examples of biological preparedness in the psychological growth of children.

*The Growth of Memory*

At around eight to ten months of age the human brain reaches an important milestone when the number of synapses in most parts of the brain has reached a peak. As a result the infant can now retrieve memories of the past, as you can remember what you ate for breakfast or what you did last evening. Before infants are eight months old they cannot retrieve the past because their brains are not sufficiently mature to permit them to reach back and recall what happened a minute earlier. After eight months they can. As a result, infants become vulnerable to a special form of anxiety.

One basic occasion for anxiety is remembering the past and comparing it with the present and noting that the two memories do not correspond. Now the person has a problem and if he or she cannot solve that cognitive problem, anxiety results. If the engine on a jet sounds odd, you only become anxious if you can remember what the engine ordinarily sounds like. If you could not retrieve that sound you would not become anxious. You may have noticed that older people who begin to lose their recall memory become less anxious.

At about eight months babies begin to show fear of strangers and fear of separation from their caretakers. You may remember that at about eight to nine months your own child cried when you left the house. A four-month-old rarely cries to that event. The eight-month-old cries because, as the mother leaves, he or she is able to compare the memory of her presence moments ago with the current perception that she is absent. The infant cannot understand that inconsistency and so has a problem. The mother was present moments ago but is not present now. As a result the infant becomes anxious.

The anxieties of infancy are a nice illustration of the principle of preparedness. All infants are prepared to become anxious about unfamiliar people and separation from their mothers at a certain age because of the maturation of the brain.

*Moral Sense and Empathy*

A second example of preparedness that is equally important to our species concerns our moral sense. The tree of knowledge allegory in the Bible may be the wisest statement ever written about humans. You will remember that when Adam and Eve ate from the tree of

knowledge God warned them that from then on humans would be different from animals because they would know the difference between right and wrong. Every moral philosopher has acknowledged, in one way or another, that deep truth about our species.

But, after the First World War, American psychology was caught up in a rampant and dogmatic environmentalism that implied that if you didn't teach a child right from wrong he might never know the difference. Psychologists taught their students in the thirties and forties that if a parent did not punish a child and inform him what was right and what was wrong, that child might grow up to be a criminal. But Genesis and Kant were closer to the truth. All children with an intact brain will, between seventeen and twenty-four months, become concerned with broken and flawed objects. This is a time when a child may point to a frayed thread on its shirt and say to the mother, "Mommy, look." The child understands there is something wrong with the shirt. This concern with right and wrong is a prepared characteristic, no different from speech or the improvement in memory at one year.

Another quality that appears at this time is empathy for the emotional state of another. Two-year-olds who live with human beings are able to infer that a person or an animal might be suffering or feeling distress. Hume, the Scottish philosopher, called that feeling sympathy and regarded it as the most fundamental human emotion. Psychologists call it empathy. Empathy for the state of another is a fundamental human emotion that does not have to be taught. It will emerge in all children in the second year. The two-year-old who is capable of empathy has also matured enough to know that if he or she caused the distress of another guilt will also appear. Like empathy, guilt does not have to be taught. Thus humans are biologically prepared to possess a minimal conscience.

Modern psychiatry made a mistake when it invented the word psychopath to apply to criminals. Applying that word to someone who murders with no emotion implies that the killer never had a conscience at any point in his development. I doubt that. As long as the killer was not brain damaged, he once knew right from wrong, and at age two had empathy. What may have happened was that life experiences during childhood and adolescence impaired his adult capacity for empathy. One can lose temporarily a basic human emotion—love is a good example. If a woman is rejected in love twelve times it will become harder for her to fall in love the next time the occasion arises. The experiences of life can reduce the adult capacity for empathy, but every child has that capacity.

*Preparedness for Responsibility*

Jean Piaget, one of the great psychologists of the twentieth century, said that children passed through stages of intellectual development and that one important stage occurred at about six to seven years of age, although children living in isolated, illiterate villages without schools pass through this stage two or three years later. I believe that at this time the brain has matured in new ways permitting a new set of mental abilities to be actualized.

You will remember that the Catholic church does not require confesson of a child before age seven; English Common Law did not view a child as responsible for a crime prior to seven years of age. These facts mean that our ancestors, long before there was child psychology, understood that something profound happens to a child at about seven years of age. In my work in rural Guatemala I found that parents with eight or nine children who did not know their ages would assign a boy the cutting of a new field for corn or assign to a daughter the responsibility of caring for an infant at about seven to eight years of age. Thus it must be that children are giving off some sign informing their parents that they are ready for responsiblity.

A second characteristic that occurs at this age is the talent to compare oneself to others. Now the child understands that he or she is prettier, less brave, or a better reader than a friend. A four-year-old cannot compare him or herself with another. This competence or ability to understand how one's qualities compare with those of a larger group has a major effect on the sense of self or self-concept. One of the components of the self-concept is the result of a psychological comparison of self with others. A child cannot know how intelligent he or she is unless he evaluates the other children in his classroom or neighborhood. Without comparative information there is no way to know how attractive, strong, brave, or intelligent one is.

*Recognition of Inconsistency*

The last preparedness I shall discuss is more abstract but is critical for human functioning. As puberty begins another important maturational change occurs. By twelve or thirteen years of age adolescents begin to examine their beliefs on a particular theme, and if they detect inconsistency among these beliefs they become troubled. Consider the following

illustration. An eight-year-old boy can hold these two beliefs and yet not feel uneasy—"My father is a wonderful man," "My father yells at my mother." Although these ideas are inconsistent, an eight-year-old does not sense their lack of concordance. By contrast, a thirteen-year-old cannot help but sense the inconsistency and is driven to resolve it.

Adolescents experience the dissonance that is inherent in their sets of beliefs about God, sex, family, and their future. The tension and stress we attribute to adolescence has less to do with an increase in sex hormones than with a new ability to recognize that one's beliefs are discordant.

This special psychological tension is stronger in the West than in isolated village communities around the world where almost everybody in the community holds the same set of beliefs. As a result, there is little inconsistency and adolescence is a less troubling period than in Western communities where there is so much pluralism in ideology.

Each of these phenomena, the anxiety of infancy as well as the cognitive dissonance of adolescence, will appear whether one's parents are kind or cruel, permissive or restrictive.

## PERSONALITY

I now turn to the second developmental story which asks how one can account for the differences among children and adults. In order to begin this discussion we have to decide what specific differences we will consider as important. Should we concentrate on swimming ability, how long a person sleeps, or whether a person laughs with gusto at jokes? Each culture values a small number of human qualities, awarding them more seriousness than others.

I believe that four such qualities valued in contemporary American society are: the acquisition of technical abilities, especially academic ones; differences in wealth and status; differences in the ability to enter into close and satisfying social relationships with others; and, finally, differences in happiness. Americans want to know why people differ on these four psychological qualities. Depending upon which of the four you pick, the profile of causative forces will be different.

*Influencing Factors*

I now want to suggest six conditions which I believe contribute to the differences in technical ability, status, social relationships, and happiness that we see among adults. Depending upon which criterion you pick the balance of the six conditions will vary. Although the six conditions do not exhaust the domain of causative factors, they are important. You will also note at the end of the discussion that only one of the six is completely within the power of the parent. The remaining five are harder for parents to influence, although they are not beyond their will.

1. *Biological temperament.* The biological temperament of the infant is one of the most basic factors. The biological and psychological differences among infants that we call temperamental can be genetic or prenatal. Babies differ in activity level, irritability, and in how easily they establish a schedule when they return home from the hospital. The temperamental quality I wish to dwell on is one that our research group has been studying for almost eight years.

During the second year of life one sees infants who are extremely timid, fearful, cautious, and shy. They rush to their mother if a stranger comes into the house, and they cry when taken to the doctor. They don't let their mother leave them the first month or two of nursery school and cling whenever they're in an unfamiliar situation, at least until they have become more relaxed. We believe about 10 to 15 percent of children who behave this way were born with a biological predisposition to develop this style. Obviously, it is possible to make a child shy and timid through family experiences.

Another 15 percent of children are born with a predisposition to develop a more sociable, outgoing, and fearless behavioral style. It is hard to frighten such children. We have been following two groups of children who were noted in the second or third year of life to be either timid and shy or sociable and outgoing. We had to observe over 400 volunteer children in our laboratory in order to find these 100 children—50 who are consistently shy and timid and 50 who are sociable, fearless and outgoing. The children in the middle are less consistent. We have followed these children for six years and find remarkable consistency in their styles of behavior. We believe this consistency is due, in part, to differences in the biochemistry of their brains.

Deep in our brains there is an area called the limbic lobe which is the origin of the stress circuits that discharge when we are frightened. The activity of these stress circuits leads us to secrete cortisol, a hormone of the adrenal gland, increases the tension in our muscles, and makes our hearts beat faster. The timid, shy children are reactive in all three of the stress circuits—namely, the pituitary-adrenal axis, the motor system, and the sympathetic chain. This fact suggests that the limbic lobe in the shy, timid children is at a lower threshhold of excitability to events that are unfamiliar or challenging.

However, some of these children have changed. We have seen parents of timid two-year-olds gently urge their children to be less shy, and over the years these children have changed. Specifically, about half of our timid, shy children at seven-and-a-half years of age are not extremely shy or timid. However, many families are fatalistic about their children and do not make gentle efforts to alter the child's temperamental qualities. When timid children enter school, many become isolated and loners. If such children come from middle-class families who promote high academic standards they are likely to choose an academic vocation such as history, poetry, or science. I believe that T. S. Eliot was one of these children.

If, on the other hand, the parents put excessive pressure on the child to succeed in some domain and the child does not have successes, that child may become extremely anxious and may show pathology later in life.

2. *Birth order.* A second condition contributing to personality differences is the child's birth order; that is, whether the child is first, second, or third born. If we compared a thousand first borns with a thousand later borns we would find that, among middle-class Americans, first borns are generally more responsible and seek to control their environment. First borns get better grades, end up going to better colleges, and, as adults, commit fewer crimes. When a stress or challenge occurs first borns are less likely to develop symptoms.

By contrast, when later borns are faced with stress they are more likely to develop problems. Later borns are more pragmatic, less idealistic, and a little more likely to be rebellious. Historical studies show that more of the rebels and terrorists of the world are later borns, and more of the idealists and abstract thinkers are first borns. For example, Trotsky the activist was a later born, Marx the scholar a first born.

Let me try to explain these differences. To a first born growing up in a traditional middle-class home, the world looks orderly. Parents are nurturant, predictable, kind people who set high standards. The child is closely attached to and identified with them and the child looks at the world as a just place where, if you do what you are told, all will be well. As first borns enter the period of childhood they ask their parents, "What is it that you want me to do? I will do it."

But the world looks different to a later born. Imagine a later born lying in his crib when suddenly a first born unpredictably shows up and intrudes into the sphere of the younger child. When a later born talks to his older sibling the latter doesn't necessarily reply, but he may seize a toy or pinch the child. Additionally, the first born can stay up until 10 o'clock, while the later born has to go to bed at sunset. Imagine these experiences happening week after week, year after year.

What might you predict to be the consequences of this regimen? One reasonable prediction is that later borns should see the world as a little less fair and just, while first borns should be more concerned with the approval of authority and less prone to disagree with or rebel against authority. First borns should want to keep harmonious relationships with authority and have less hostile feelings toward authority. If, as an adult, the person picks science as a vocation, one might predict that if a new scientific theory opposed what authority believed to be correct, and, therefore, threatened the society, the first born would be more likely to question the new idea. The more defiant later born would be more likely to favor it.

We are talking here about theories for which citizens have strong opinions. Educated citizens cared when Copernicus and Darwin said that the Bible's interpretation of the heavens or of man's place in nature was wrong. By contrast, the laser, although a brilliant discovery, did not threaten the average person's beliefs about man and nature. We are concerned here not with brilliant discoveries but with brilliant, new ideas about which most people have fixed beliefs.

Frank Sulloway, a young historian, has done research on this issue. He studied a large number of revolutions in science where the themes were of concern to society. Some of these revolutions included the ideas of Copernicus, Francis Bacon, [illegible] of course, Darwin. He then sought to determine what the eminent scientists of the time said about each revolutionary idea in a ten-year period after its original discovery. Was the scientist

for or against the new idea and was he a first or later born? In studies of a dozen different scientific revolutions and many hundreds of scientists, he found that those who agreed with a new idea were likely to be later borns, while those who opposed it were likely to be first borns.* Thus one's attitude about a new scientific idea is influenced by one's ordinal position and seems to have little to do with that child's specific relationship to its parents.

3. *Parental influence.* Parents assume importance in our third condition, which deals with parental behavior toward the child. Parental behavior tends to assume its greatest importance during the first six or seven years of life.

There are three experiences that parents can provide that have a profound influence on their children. One of the least impeachable facts in child development is that the child's mental development will be stimulated if a parent provides a great deal of variety for the infant. Hence, parents who play with and talk to their children and present them with tameable variety will promote their children's mental development. Parents who do not behave this way will slow their child's intellectual development. Obviously, this variety can be supplied by a babysitter or a daycare center.

Some of the intellectual differences between a working- and a middle-class child are apparent by two to three years of age. Although working-class mothers love their children, they generally provide less variety during the period of infancy. It is not clear why they behave this way. Perhaps they don't believe in the effectiveness of presenting variety to the child.

A second way parents influence their children is through praise and punishment. The child does learn values in accord with what is rewarded and punished. Thus if parents discipline a child for dirtying his shirt or not cleaning his hands and do so consistently, they will get a five-year-old who is a little worried about keeping his shirt and hands clean. If a parent praises schoolwork, the child will become more concerned with doing well in school, at least during the early years of school.

A final source of parental influence involves communicating to the child that the parents value him or her. This experience is more important in our society in this century than it was in the past. You will recall that human beings have a natural tendency to

* Sulloway, F. Family constellations, sibling rivalry and scientific revolutions. Unpublished manuscript, 1972.

evaluate themselves as good or bad. We all want our consciences to be gentle with us. When the day is done and we ask ourselves in the quiet of the evening, "How are you doing?" we want to be able to answer, "I am a good person." We are essentially moral creatures; in our daily lives we are engaged in a moral mission. A child growing up in a Third World village has to gather wood for the family, prepare supper, or wash clothes in the river. As a result it is obvious to such children that they are good. These seven-year-olds know that they are making a contribution to the family's vitality. Hence no adult has to say to them—and they usually don't—"I love you very much, Maria." Maria has less of a need for this communication because she knows she is of value.

In a society like ours, however, where children make no economic contribution to the family they have to be reassured about their goodness. That is one reason why love, the communication of value, has become so important. Historical changes made loving children, and the communication of love to children, important.

Loving a child does not necessarily mean giving that child a great deal of physical affection. John Stuart Mill recalled that his father was a wonderful person but not an emotionally close one. I have been reading an autobiography by a colleague, George Homans, who is now an emeritus professor. He writes of his father, "I could not have been blessed with a better father. I always enjoyed being with him, I respected him. Yet, I must say, I never felt emotionally close to him." A child can feel loved and can love a parent, even though there is not a great deal of physical affection between them. Some young Americans have a hard time understanding that idea because our culture has come to equate parental love with kissing and embracing.

4. *Identification with role models.* The fourth set of counditions is, in my opinion, the most important, and almost every philosopher has made this point, but we continue to forget it. In modern dynamic pyschology the phenomenon I am referring to is called identification. Let me explain this idea. The child believes that some of the qualities of his or her parents also belong to the child. The child, as well as the adult, go beyond the objective facts and conclude, "I have the same last name as my family, I have the same color hair as my father, and my aunt noticed that my father and I both have dimples in our chins." The child goes beyond those facts and concludes that "because my father is popular I must be popular too; because my father is talented, I must also be talented." Or

the child can conclude, "No one respects my father, therefore no one will respect me." An identification with the parent can be positive or negative.

I believe that a parent's most important influence on a child originates in his or her status as a role model with whom that child can identify. One problem is that most parents find it difficult to hide their deep qualities, especially if these are undesirable. If a child perceives that the mother is competent, kind, nurturing and attractive, then, fair or unfair, that seven-year-old girl will feel better about herself than she would otherwise. But if the mother is incompetent, not liked, and perceived to be unjust, then the child, even though she possesses none of those qualities, will feel bad, perhaps guilty. Many schizophrenics have identified with a rejecting mother they labeled as bad. As a result, they have these anxious feelings about themselves. A typical statement from a young schizophrenic woman to her psychiatrist is, "I'll tell you my problem, deep inside of me there is a great deal of evil." That feeling is a result of identification with a parent whom one perceives as bad.

Even though parents have limited control over how they present themselves to their children, it is their strongest power for it will influence the child's conception of self for many years. The child can also identify with his or her class or ethnic group. A child who is a member of a disadvantaged minority group is likely to perceive his or her group to be rejected by the larger society. As a result, the child will feel anxiety. In contemporary American society, disadvantaged Hispanic and Black children live with this burden if they identified with their ethnic group when they were young. Even though some grow up to be successful, they can carry the vulnerability for many years. A book that will bring a tear to your cheek, written by John Henry Wideman, is about a pair of Black brothers growing up in a ghetto in Pittsburgh. The older brother, a professor of English at the University of Wyoming, has written three novels and is respected in his community. His younger brother is serving a life sentence in a Pennsylvania prison for murder. The older brother, in an attempt to understand his younger brother, wrote a book called *Brothers and Keepers.** In this book he confesses that although he is a professor of English who has written many books, every morning when he wakes up he is afraid he will be discovered. That feeling of vulnerability is a product of an earlier identification. Mr. Wideman may go to his grave anxious and suspecting that one day the larger society will discover this mysterious lack of goodness.

* Wideman, John Edgar. *Brothers and Keepers.* New York: Holt, Reinhart, and Winston, 1984.

5. *Success and failure.* A fifth condition that influences the child resides in actual environmental successes and failures. Success in school depends in part on the size of the school. Many studies show that if the talent of a child is held constant, the probability of that child being successful is higher if he or she goes to a small school than to a very large one. Similarly, whether the peer group accepts or rejects the child is important. My colleague George Homans was not very popular with his peers and he writes that his classmates bullied and teased him. As a result he decided that he would become talented in schoolwork. The rejection by his peers and the subsequent decision set his life career.* It had less to do with his parents than with his experiences in school.

6. *Chance and history.* Finally we consider chance as a factor. Unlike the Chinese and the Malaysians, we in the West are less willing to acknowledge the role of chance in our lives. The Greeks acknowledged the power of the gods' moods. You will remember that in *The Odyssey*, Athena decides what will happen to Odysseus; maybe she will cause a storm or arrange conditions to beach his boat on the rocks. But Americans want to believe that each is a master of his or her fate. If an adult is successful, he wants to believe that he did it through talent and motivation. If one fails, he or she did something wrong. And in our theories of human development we give chance events very little power.

Let me cite a few factors that are outside the control of children or families and, therefore, from that perspective are chance events. What was the size of the town in which the child grew up? If one leafs through *Who's Who in America* and notes the places where each person grew up, you will find that over 60 percent came from towns under 50,000 although the vast majority of Americans grow up in urban areas. How can we explain that anomaly?

Consider a nine-year-old girl with an I.Q. of 120 who is skilled and has kind parents. On the one hand, let us have her grow up in Salado, Texas; on the other in Chicago. In Salado there will be very few girls as talented as she, and if she stays there through high school she will graduate as a seventeen-year-old who feels very good about herself because she has compared herself with the other girls in the town and realized that she was in the top five percent. In Chicago she will know over two hundred girls who are more talented and pretty than she and, as a result, she will learn humility.

* Homans, G. C. *Coming to My Senses.* New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1984.

That's why those listed in *Who's Who* spent their childhoods in small towns. Among the first group of astronaut candidates, three-quarters grew up in small towns—towns without great museums, large aquariums, or six-story libraries.

If one is going to succeed in an extraordinary way it is necessary to have an illusion about the self. The adolescent must believe that he or she is much better than others are. Illusion is harder to establish if there are several hundred children one's own age who are more talented, attractive or courageous.

Historical events that influence the entire society comprise another chance factor. The depression of the 1930s is one example. Sociologists have found that if a child was between seven and fifteen years of age during the depression his adult behavior was influenced profoundly. Many who were adolescents in Europe after World War I, the spiritual war that was to solve all of the world's problems, became skeptics for the rest of their lives.

An American youth in high school or college during the Vietnam War was also influenced in a serious way. I would like to find two hundred 35-year-olds who were ages fifteen to eighteen during the Vietnam protests in cities like San Francisco, Chicago, New York, and Boston and compare them with similar groups who are five years younger or five years older. I believe that I would find profound differences among these groups because of the experiences that occurred to them during the Vietnam era. These experiences had little to do with the kindness or meanness of their parents but were the result of events that were totally outside familial control.

With computers gaining ascendance, a child between seven and fifteen years old today will be influenced by the introduction of computers into the schools and society.

# CONCLUSION

I have listed six factors that can have important effects on the growth of children. Two involve parents. They pertain to what parents do and what they are—their actual practices with their children and how they are viewed as role models for identification. But parents have far less control over the other four factors. That is why I said earlier that parents have power but that power is constrained. The limitation does not mean that parents should not invest effort and care in rearing children. They should be loving and conscientious as parents and should reflect on their actions. Indeed, they cannot do otherwise, for humans are prepared to believe that they can have an effect on the world. But they also must realize that the growing child is a product of the coming together of many, many coherent events, including the child's temperament, historical era, and birth order. An individual life is a complex story with many collaborators.